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**AN UNUSUAL TRICONCHAL CHURCH IN THE
VICINITY OF SVRLJIG (“MANASTIRIŠTE SVETE PETKE
RUSALNE”): ORIGINAL FORM, ARCHITECTURAL
ANALOGIES, AND POTENTIAL DATE OF
CONSTRUCTION¹**

Manastirište Svete Petke Rusalne is located between the villages of Ribare and Đurinac, southeast of the present-day town of Svrljig in east Serbia. The two villages are nested on the northern slopes of the Svrljiške Planine range, on the southern fringes of the Svrljiški Timok river valley. The site features architectural remains – mostly foundations and lower zones of walls – indicating that they belonged to a church with an untypical and very interesting plan: most likely a triconch inscribed within the perimeter wall masses, which are flat to the exterior (fig. 1). This inspired the present study of the church, which primarily aims at establishing the building’s original form and date of construction. The starting point is an analysis of preserved and reasonably assumed architectural elements, which are compared with medieval churches of similar plans or spatial organization in Serbia and a wider Balkan region. This helps in reconstructing the architectural form to some extent and the employed design

¹ This paper represents a shorter and revised version of a study written in conjunction with the Project for the Reconstruction of the Church of St. Petka Rusalna. The study and the Project were submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of architect-conservator at the State Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia, where they were presented and defended on June 4, 2003. The materials and results pertaining to the study of this church have been presented at scholarly meetings on two occasions: in November 2006, at the 38th National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Washington DC – in the session “The Church and Ecclesiastical Objects in Medieval Serbia,” organized by Ljubica Popovich and Jelena Bogdanović – and in June 2018, at the Conference “Niš and Byzantium 17”, Niš. I am grateful for all comments and suggestions I received at both gatherings, particularly those by Jelena Bogdanović, Svetlana Popović, and Ida Sinkević at the former, and by Ivan Vasilev and Vassil Tenekedjiev at the latter. They helped me in revising the original paper and reinforcing arguments for the presumable dating of the church. I also thank Vladimir Božinović, who was a constructive interlocutor during the final stage in writing of this paper at the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED) of Koç University, Istanbul.

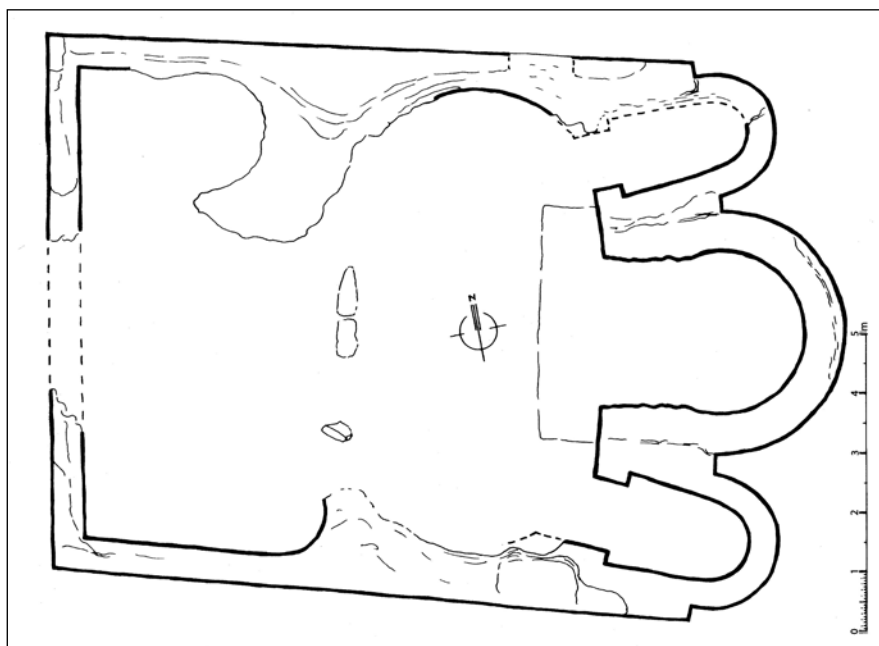


Fig. 1. Manastirište Svete Petke Rusalne, remains of the church, ground plan (drawing: author; archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Niš)

Сл. 1. Манастириште Свете Петке Русалне, остаци цркве, основа (цртеж аутора; документација Завода за заштиту споменика културе Ниш)

concept, as well as understanding how certain parts of the church may have been used. Moreover, the comparative examples and the available information on medieval Svrljig and its environs enable a proposal of the time of construction, since the exact date can be established only after necessary systematic archaeological excavations, which are yet to be undertaken.

Description of the Remains

Manastirište Svete Petke Rusalne – located about 1-2 km southwest of Ribare – consists of architectural remains, situated on a clearing in the mountain at the edge of a picturesque ravine with a stream (figs. 2, 3). The location is at some distance from the Timok river valley and hidden from it. According to the name given by the locals to this site – Manastirište, which means “the site of a former monastery” – one can assume that a monastic complex once stood here. This assumption can explain the choice of location for the church, isolated from the valley and the road, which was active in both Late Antique and medieval periods.² Sv. Petka Rusalna in the dedication does not refer to an actual saint. The

² For a more detailed description of this site’s location and a short expositions of other archeological sites in the immediate vicinity, see Н. Станковић, *Остаци цркве необичне основе код Сврљига (Манастириште Свете Петке Русалне)*, Гласник



Fig. 2. Remains of the church from northeast (photo: J. Šurdilović, 2002; archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Niš)

Сл. 2. Остаци цркве са североистока (фото: Ј. Шурдиловић, 2002.; документација Завода за заштиту споменика културе Ниш)

name is a personification of the holiday of “Rusalni petak” or “Blagi petak”, the first Friday after the feast of Pentecost, which is celebrated annually in Ribare and Đurinac, with a little probability that it is related to the original dedication.³ Only the latter of these two villages is mentioned in sparse written records, in the cumulative *defter* (Ottoman tax register) of 1466 and in the general *defter* of 1478-81 for the *Sancak* of Vidin.⁴ However, none of these documents supplies

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³ First Friday after the Pentecost is when the *litije* (festal religious procession) in Ribare take place. The *litije* in Đurinac are performed on the feast of St. Mark the Evangelist (April 25/May 8), which used to be celebrated in Ribare alike in the past (according to the Milojević family from Ribare; I thank Igor Milojević for acquiring this information and sharing it with me). It appears that St. Mark enjoyed a special reverence in this part of the Svrlijig region, judging from a small church in the village of Beloinje being dedicated to him as well (see *ibid.*, n. 13). It is actually possible that our church was originally dedicated to St. Mark and that the memory of this was preserved through the devotion to him, manifested in these instances.

⁴ Д. Бојанић, *Фрагменти једног збирног и једног опширног пописа Видинског санџака из друге половине XV века*, *Miscellanea* 2 (Београд 1973), 64-65 (rendered as *Džurince* and recorded as a part of the *īmār* of Ahiya, *dizdār* [castle warden] of the fort of



Fig. 3. Remains of the church from southwest (photo: J. Šurdilović, 2002; archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Niš)

Сл. 3. Остаци цркве с југозапада (фото: Ј. Шурдиловић, 2002.; документација Завода за заштиту споменика културе Ниш)



Fig. 4. Remains of the church from east (photo: J. Šurdilović, 2002; archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Niš)

Сл. 4. Остаци цркве с истока (фото: Ј. Шурдиловић, 2002.; документација Завода за заштиту споменика културе Ниш)



Fig. 5. Remnants of mortar-filled joints and horizontal lines drawn in fresh mortar on the outer face of the central apse (photo: J. Šurdilović, 2002; archives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Niš) and of the north wall (photo: author, 2006)

Сл. 5. Остаци дерсовања на спољашњој страни средишње апсиде (фото: Ј. Шурдиловић, 2002.; документација Завода за заштиту споменика културе Ниш) и северног зида (фото: аутор, 2006.)



Fig. 6. Pieces of worked tufa stone found in the rubble: A – cut in the form of an arch, and B – wedge-shaped (photo: author, 2006.)

Сл. 6. Комади обрађене сиге пронађени у шуту: А – лучно засечен и В – клинасто обликован (фото: аутор, 2006.)

information on a church, church ruins, or priests in Đurinac.⁵ This suggests that, by this time, our church was out of function and most probably had already been ruined.

Banja) and 131-132 (rendered as *Đurci*, the *has* of the *za'īm* of Svrljig).

⁵ The *defter* of 1478-81 provides information on Priest Radivoj in Gulijan, Priest Radoslav in Okruglica, and Duša, son of a priest, in Periš (*ibid.*, 133, 142, 121, respectively), implying that these or some other neighbouring villages had active churches.

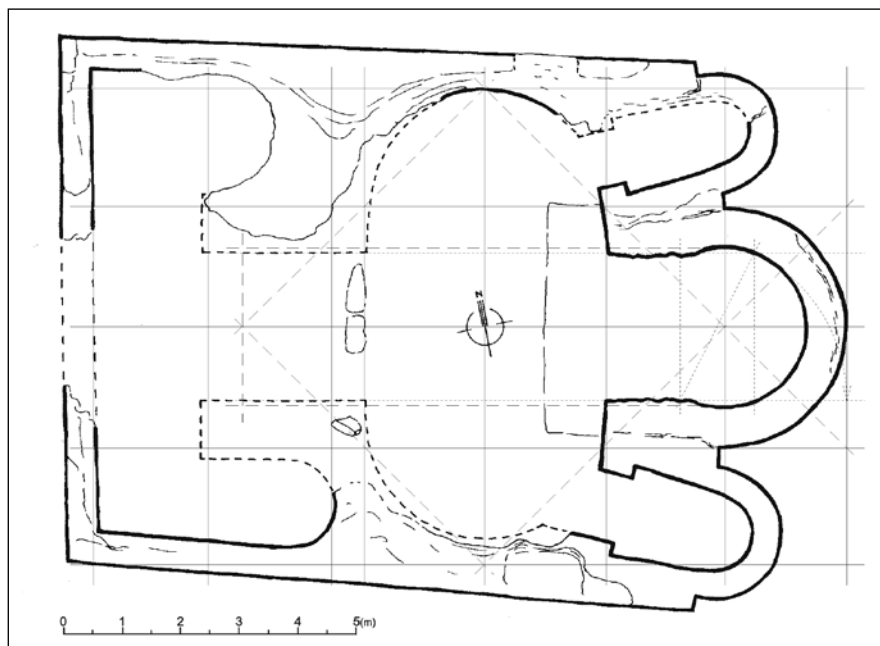


Fig. 7. Ground plan of the church (current state), analysis of geometry and ratios (drawing: author)

Сл. 7. Основа цркве (затечено стање), анализа геометрије и пропорцијских односа (цртеж аутора)

Notwithstanding the possibility that here once existed a monastery, today no other remains but those of the church can be discerned (see figs. 2, 3). The perimeter walls of the church measure roughly 13.00 m on the longer side and 9.20 m on the shorter one, and they form a rhomboid rather than a rectangle in plan (see fig. 1).⁶ Three semicircular apses close the east side of the building. What has survived is limited to the foundations and lower zones of the walls, whose height ranges between 30 and 100cm. The state of preservation, which is overall rather poor (see fig. 3), varies from segment to segment. The inner sides of the north and south walls are in a particularly bad condition, the middle section of the west wall is fully missing – even the foundations cannot be traced at this part – while the walls of the apses are relatively well preserved (figs. 2, 4).

The church apparently consisted of three main parts: narthex, *naos*, and tripartite sanctuary or, rather, three sanctuary rooms, as there is no direct communication between them and the access to each is provided only from the *naos* (see fig. 1). The two rooms on the sides are positioned not parallel to the central one, but at an angle to its axis. On its eastern end, each of the three rooms ter-

⁶ A tacheometric survey of the remains was conducted by architect Milosav Vuković in July 2000. An architectural and photographic survey was undertaken by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Niš on February 26, 2002. The author of the present study, then an associate of the Institute, produced the architectural drawings, which are also used here. The photographs are the work of Jovan Šurdilović.

minates in an apse, which is semicircular both inside and out. The two apses of the lateral rooms are almost twice smaller than that of the central one. The latter apse is slightly wider than the central room's opening towards the naos, which makes the room horseshoe-shaped in plan.⁷

Exterior faces of the north and south walls of the church are clearly flat (see figs. 2, 3). However, in interior, towards the *naos*, although the faces of these walls have not survived, changes in width of the masonry suggest not rectilinear, but rather concave forms (see figs. 3, 1). This indicates the existence of large semicircular recesses in the masses of the lateral walls, which together with the main apse of the sanctuary constituted a triconchal arrangement in the interior of the church (see fig. 7). And the presence of side conches and their curved walls actually explains the unusual directions of the sanctuary's flanking rooms: in order to get the access from the *naos*, with which they solely communicate, exactly through the conches, the two chambers could not be parallel to the main sanctuary room.

Farther west, masonry masses come out of the lateral walls and establish a separation between the *naos* and the narthex. If my reading of the form of these masses is correct, they enclosed two little chambers north and south of the narthex, both with semicircular endings to the east. There is no archaeological evidence for the function of these rooms. Due to the lack of the central segment of the church's west wall, it is also not possible to determine the exact position and dimension of the main entrance.

The wall remnants show that the church was entirely built in stone, using rough-hewn limestone pieces and mortar. Not too large stone blocks were laid in relatively regular horizontal courses consisting of nearly same-sized pieces, probably trimmed on the very site before they were built in. This technique, as can be seen on the main apse (fig. 4), leaves the impression of a good and precise masonwork. It seems that the builders intended to provide such an effect, further emphasizing it by filling in rough joints with mortar and drawing horizontal lines in it while still fresh, as can be seen on the exterior surfaces of the main apse (fig. 5A) and of the north wall (fig. 5B). In the south sanctuary room, at the foot of its north wall, there are traces of a reddish plastering, whose color and structure appear as in a hydraulic mortar.

If one excludes the concrete topping on the wall of the central sanctuary space (see figs. 2, 3), which provided base for a wooden chapel built in the 20th century, no distinct building phases are apparent, in other words all parts of the church were built simultaneously. The north part of the church was grounded directly on a bedrock (fig. 3). The terrain noticeably descends to the southeast, which makes a considerable difference between floor levels in the narthex and the sanctuary (see figs. 2, 4). Pieces of tufa stone can be found in the rubble, but their present shape cannot affirm that these were used as voussoirs of a vault or an arch. However, I have found several worked pieces, whose forms suggest that they may have been used for building the upper, semicircular parts of win-

⁷ An apse of a similar plan is to be seen in the Crkvina of St. Stephen, in the vicinity of the nearby Svrljiški Grad (Svrljig Castle), which was recorded in Ђ. Бошковић, *Средњевијековни споменици источне Србије II*, Старица II (Београд 1951), 221-244, 235, fig. 29.

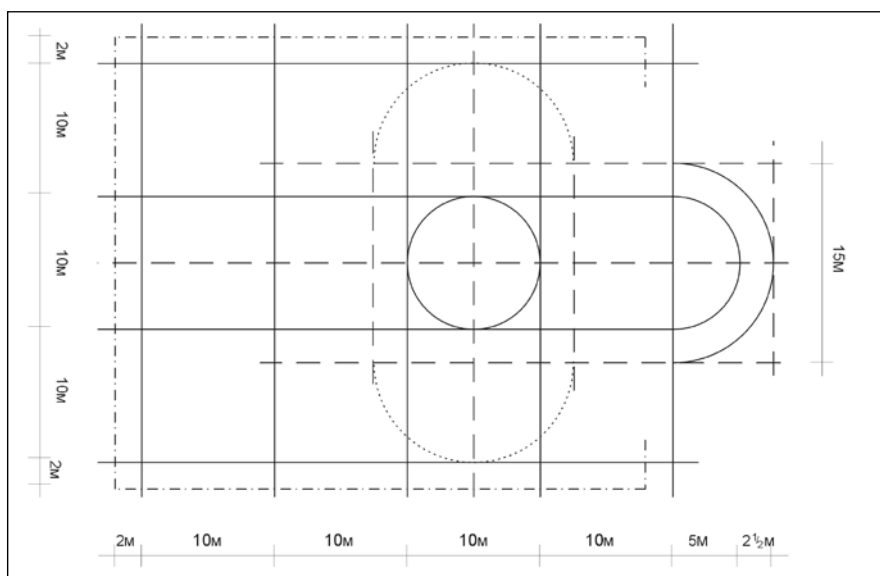


Fig. 8. Supposed measuring scheme used for laying out the church plan (drawing: author)

Сл. 8. Претпостављена схема мерења основе цркве (цртеж аутора)

dows (fig. 6A). Another one, shaped as a wedge (fig. 6B), looks as if purposefully made to be fitted between arched openings of a double-window. No bricks have been found either in the walls or in the rubble.

Original Planning, Form, and Possible Spatial and Functional Organization

A analysis of the geometry and ratios of the church's surviving elements (fig. 7) shows that the central sanctuary room, with its walls, can be inscribed in a square measuring 4.10 by 4.10m. The center of the square simultaneously serves as the center of semicircles of the inner and outer faces of the apse. The square of the same size added to the west determines the central bay of the *naos*. This square's center was most likely the intersection point of the longitudinal and transversal axes. The latter functioned as the axis of symmetry for two lateral conches.

The analysis has also yielded the measure of 55cm as being used for dimensioning of several elements. Namely, the wall of the narthex is 55cm thick and both inner and outer dimensions of the main apse contain this measure as the multiplicand: the inner diameter is 275cm, which is 5 times 55cm, while the outer one is roughly 412.5cm, which comes from multiplying 55cm by 7.5. Based on these data, I have made an assumption that the basic unit (M) for laying out the plan was *ca.* 27.5cm. Thus the starting square measures 15Mx15M, inner diameter of the main apse 10M, the narthex wall 2M, etc. (fig. 8). Now, considering the measures of the whole building, it can be assumed that the composition of the plan consisted of laying out a rectangle sized 40Mx30M (4:3),

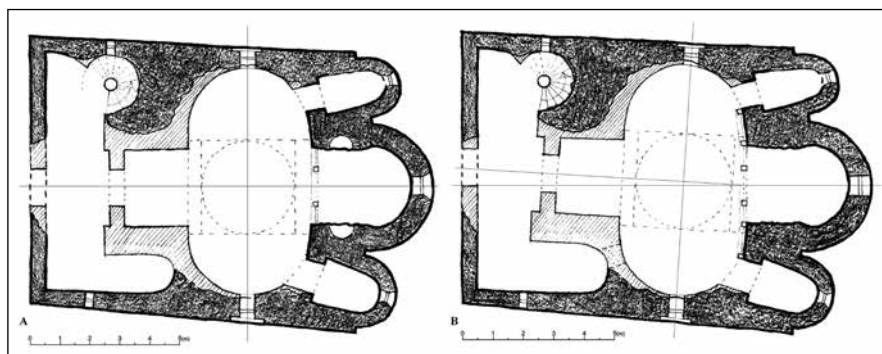


Fig. 9. Hypothetic reconstruction of the church's ground plan, two variants (drawings: author)

Сл. 9. Идеална реконструкција основе цркве, две варијанте (цртежи аутора)

to which an apse of 10M was added. After that, “strips” of 2M were attached along the north, west, and south sides, and of 2.5M in the apse, for the thickness of the walls. However, it is hard to compare the value of 27.5cm with known medieval measures for length, even with those of the closest one, foot, which takes between 29.2 and 30.4cm in Serbian medieval monuments,⁸ while its value was even greater in Byzantium, from 30.8 to 32.0cm.⁹ Similarly, it is inexplicable why the plan of the church got slightly skewed, even though the builders could use the well-known opportunity that the so-called “Egyptian triangle” (3:4:5) provided in laying out a right angle on the ground.¹⁰

This analysis of proportions provides parameters for an ideal reconstruction of the missing architectural elements, both in the plan and in the upper zones. However, a problem emerges at the very outset: the axis of the sanctuary does not coincide with the axis of the building. This circumstance allows for two variants of reconstruction of the plan, depending which of the two axes is employed (*fig. 9*). The first variant is geometrically more logical in terms of interior organization of the naos, but opens the problem of position of the main entrance to the narthex, which in this organizational scheme does not get the position in the middle of the west façade. For that reason, the second variant, which is based on the combination of two axes, has been adopted as more real-

⁸ С. М. Ћирковић, *Мерење и мере у средњовековној Србији*, С. М. Ћирковић, *Работници, војници, духовници: Друштва средњовековног Балкана*, Београд 1997, 135-168, 143, based on S. Vasiljević, *Naši stari graditelji i njihova stvaralačka kultura*, *Zbornik zaštite spomenika kulture 6-7* (Beograd 1955-56), 1-33, and B. Kopač, *Градитељска школа Поморја*, Београд 1965, 160-174.

⁹ E. Schilbach, *Pous*, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, New York – Oxford 1991, Vol. 3: 1708. It is yet to be established whether the value of the foot differed between regions in Byzantium.

¹⁰ The presence of a bedrock and the terrain descending to the southeast (see above) may have been the reason for this.

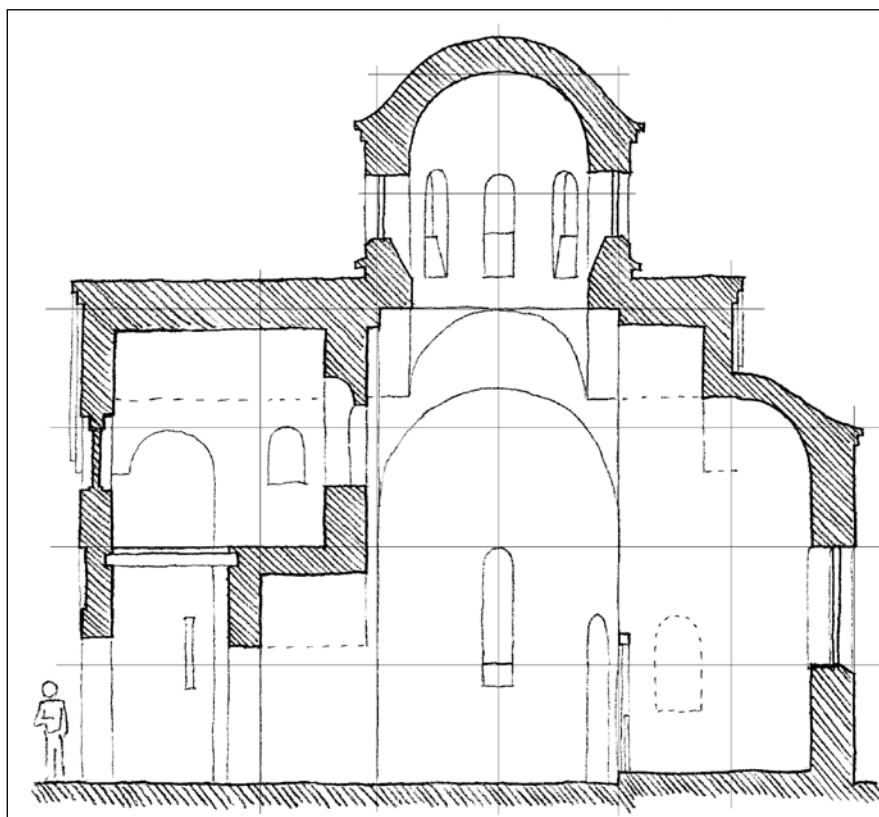


Fig. 10. Hypothetic reconstruction of the church, longitudinal section looking north (drawing: author)

Сл. 10. Идеална реконструкција цркве, подужни пресек (цртеж аутора)

istic. This variant not only enables the placement of a doorway in the middle of the west façade, but more closely corresponds to the forms suggested by the preserved parts of the building.

The most difficult task is to reconstruct the architectural form of the upper zones. The question whether a dome existed above the *naos* is the most important. Even though a domed structure is implicated by the presence of a triconch, the fact that the lateral conches are wider than the eastern one, thus causing the central bay to be rectangular rather than square in plan, certainly provided a challenge for the builders. The simplest solution would have been that instead of a dome there was a longitudinal barrel vault over the nave, all the way from the apse to the narthex. This tall vaulted nave would be adjoined by the lateral conches. If their height was the same as that of the nave, they would provide elements for the formation of a cruciform design in the roof zone. However, if there was a dome, which seems more likely, its base was either ellipsoid in the longitudinal direction – following the shape of the central bay – or reduced to a circle by the use of smaller transversal arches or some other solution (*figs. 10,*

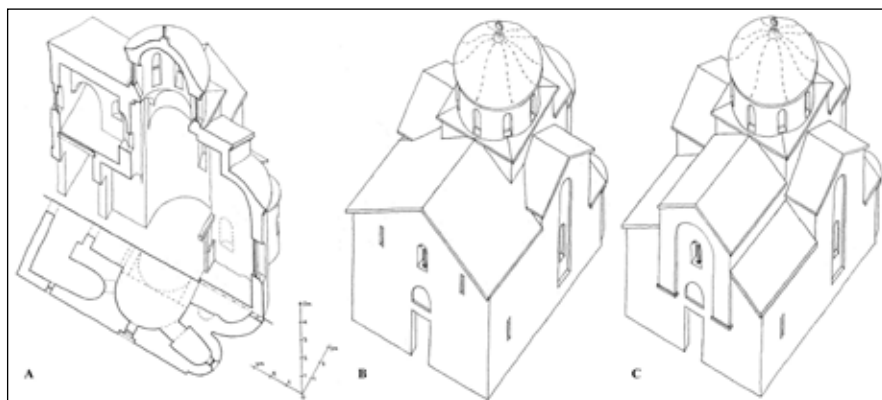


Fig. 11. Hypothetic reconstruction of the church: A – axonometric cut-off, B – axonometric view from southwest, C – axonometric view, variant with a denivelation of roof planes (drawings: author)

Сл. 11. Идеална реконструкција цркве: А – аксонометријски пресек, В – аксонометријски приказ споља, С – аксонометријски приказ споља, варијанта са денивелисаним кровним равнима (цртежи аутора)

11A).¹¹ In any case, conches joined the central core and contributed to what probably appeared as a cross-in-square design in exterior (fig. 11B). The cruciform structure could have been further accentuated by a denivelation of roof planes over the narthex (fig. 11C).

One moves further in the field of conjecture when turned to the issue of the functional organization within the church. The first issue is why do the eastern corner chambers have no direct connection with the room between them, which undoubtedly provided space for the sanctuary? In another words, if these two functioned as the *pastophoria* – i. e. *prothesis* and *diakonikon*, which was the standard solution in the medieval and post-medieval church architecture – why do not they communicate directly with the sanctuary? If they indeed were *pastophoria*, their independent treatment proposes a 6th-century date for the church, the time when these liturgical rooms migrate from the west end of the church to its east end, but – retaining the same manner of use within the liturgy – still do not have immediate communication with the sanctuary.¹² In the following centuries, organization of the sanctuary as a group of three physically and functionally separate rooms, often each featuring an altar, continues to appear

¹¹ An example of a dome formed above a rectangular space, with longer north and south sides, is offered by the rock-cut, cruciform in plan Chapel 27 in Göreme, Cappadocia (see note 63 below).

¹² On *prothesis* and *diakonikon* in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium, see Y. D. Varalis, *Prothesis and Diakonikon: Searching the Original Concept of the Subsidiary Spaces of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, Hierotopy: Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia, ed. Alexei Lidov, Moscow 2006, 282-298 (with older bibliography). On their form and function in Constantinopolitan churches of the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, see V. Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual in the Churches of Constantinople: Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries*, Cambridge – New York 2014, 30-41.

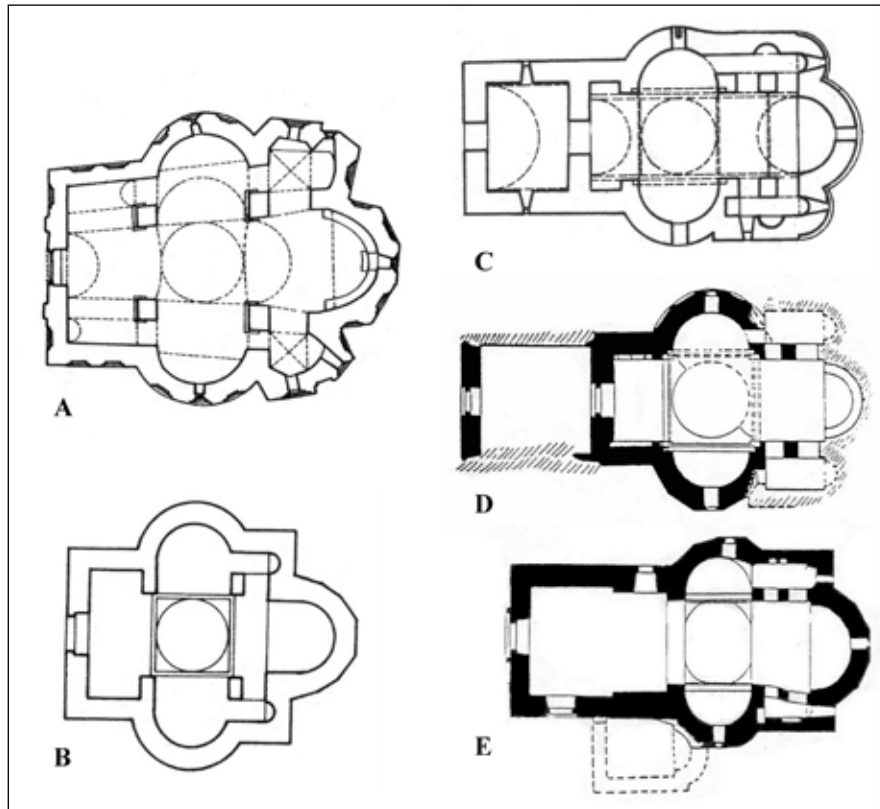


Fig. 12. A – Ground plans of some churches of the Morava School: A – Drenča (after B. Vulović), B – Lešje, C – Petruša (both after V. Ristić), D – Lapušnja, and E – Lozica (both after Đ. Bošković)

Сл. 12. Основе неких цркава Моравске школе: А – Дренча (према Б. Вуловићу), В – Лешје, С – Петруша (обе према В. Ристићу), Д – Лапушња и Е – Лозица (обе према Ђ. Бошковићу)

in the ecclesiastic architecture of Armenia and Asia Minor.¹³ The horseshoe shape of the central sanctuary space is yet another feature that brings to mind Armenian and churches in Anatolia (Cappadocia, in particular¹⁴), although it

¹³ See J.-M. Thierry *et al.*, *Armenian Art* (trans. C. Dars), New York 1989, esp. 469-595, 598-600 (for Armenia), and L. Rodley, *Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia*, Cambridge 1985, 13, 27, 35, 49, 64, 86, 163, 214 (for some examples in Cappadocia); a liturgical examination of multiple-sanctuary arrangements in Cappadocian churches is offered in N. B. Teteriatnikov, *The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia*, Roma 1996, 42-55, esp. 51-52, where churches of cruciform plans, conceptually close to the church in Ribare, are discussed.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Restle, *Studien zur frühbyzantinischen Architektur Kappadokiens*, Wien 1979, Vol. 2, plans 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 20, 24, 26, 27, 32, 34, 35, 39, 42, 45, 46, 48, 50, and 51 (for built churches) and Rodley, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 35, 49, 58, 64, 86, 96, 146, 163, 190, 194, 203, 208, 214 (for rock-cut churches).

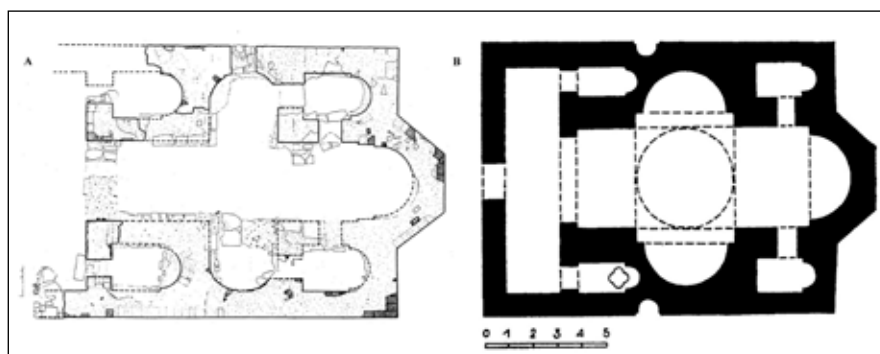


Fig. 13. A – Krupište (Kale locality), so-called “Red Church”, ground plan (after B. Aleksova); B – Kulata (near Petrich), church, ground plan (after N. Chaneva-Dechevska)

Сл. 13. А – Крупиште (локалитет Кале), тзв. Црвене цркве, основа (према Б. Алексовој); В – Кулата (код Петрича), црква, основа (према Н. Чаневој-Дечевској)

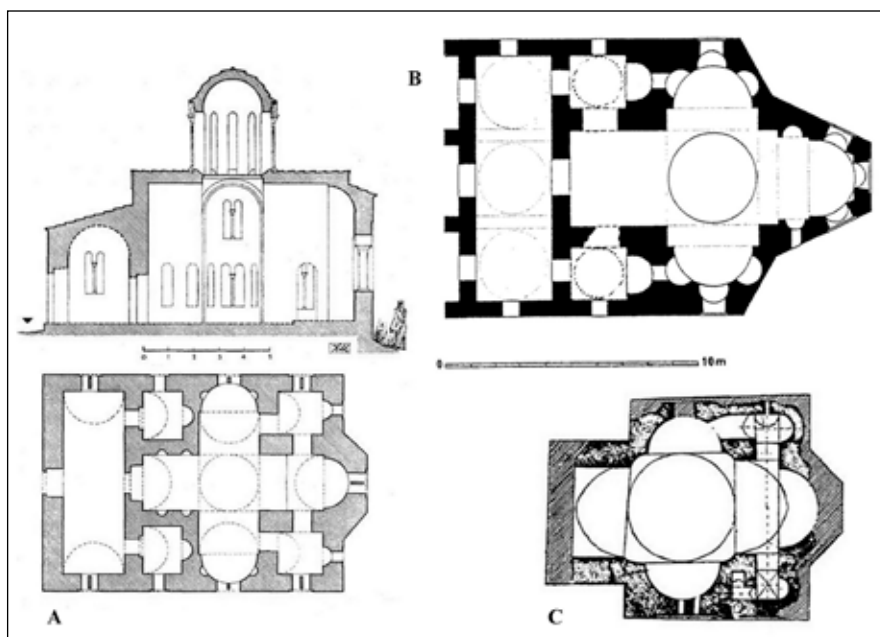


Fig. 14. A – Church of St. Nicholas in Aulis, ground plan and longitudinal section looking north (after Ch. Bouras); B – Church of St. Dēmētrios in Varassova, ground plan (after S. Čurčić); C – Church at Vineni (near Ohrid), ground plan (after Ѓ. Janković)

Сл. 14. А – Црква св. Николе у Аулиди, основа и подужни пресек (према Х. Бурасу); В – Црква св. Димитрија у Варасови, основа (према С. Ћурчићу); С – Винени (код Охрида), основа цркве (према Ѓ. Јанковићу)

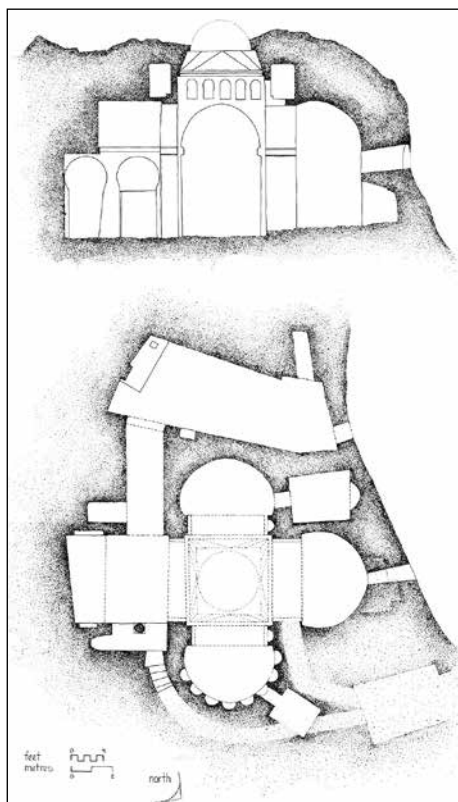


Fig. 15. So-called Triconch of Tağar (Cappadocia), ground plan and longitudinal section looking north (after S. Kostof)

Сл. 15. Тзв. Таарски триконхос (Кападокија), основа и подужни пресек (према С. Костофу)

is not exclusive to the architecture of these regions. These design details suggest that our church may have belonged to an enclave of Armenians or a group of people with architectural and/or liturgical roots in the eastern parts of Byzantine Empire.¹⁵ However, this potential explanation for the ancestry of the architectural peculiarities in the church has a problem: there is no evidence of the existence of either Armenian or other ethnic communities in this part of the Balkans.

And what to say about the triconchal form of the naos, which does not conform to the plans of Early Byzantine churches found on the territory of Serbia? Inscribing of a triconch into a rectangular structure is rather uncommon. Centrally planned structures, including the triconchs, are in this period most often associated with the function of a martyrium.¹⁶ If this was the case in our church, the middle room could have offered a complete sanctuary, with the *prothesis* and *diakonikon* being provided by two niches accommodated in the thickness of the lateral walls (see *fig. 11A*). The side rooms then could have been used for keeping relics or would have had

some other devotional function.

The two rooms flanking the narthex were likewise clearly set aside with some purpose in mind. They may have served as funerary chambers or small chapels. In the Middle Byzantine period, a narthex with paired annexes is not a rare occurrence, where the northern annex would serve as a funerary chapel, intended for burials and memorial services, while the one to the south would be reserved for a water font, *agiasma*, where the Great Blessing of the Waters was performed on Epiphany and the blessed water stored afterwards.¹⁷ Similar

¹⁵ Further analogies with architectural solutions found in Armenian architecture are discussed below.

¹⁶ M. J. Johnson, *Martyrion*, The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, New York – Oxford 1991, Vol. 2: 1308-1309.

¹⁷ I. Sinkević, *Western Chapels in Middle Byzantine Churches: Meaning and Significance*, *Starinar* LII (2002; Beograd 2003): 79-91. Here, one can find many Middle Byzantine

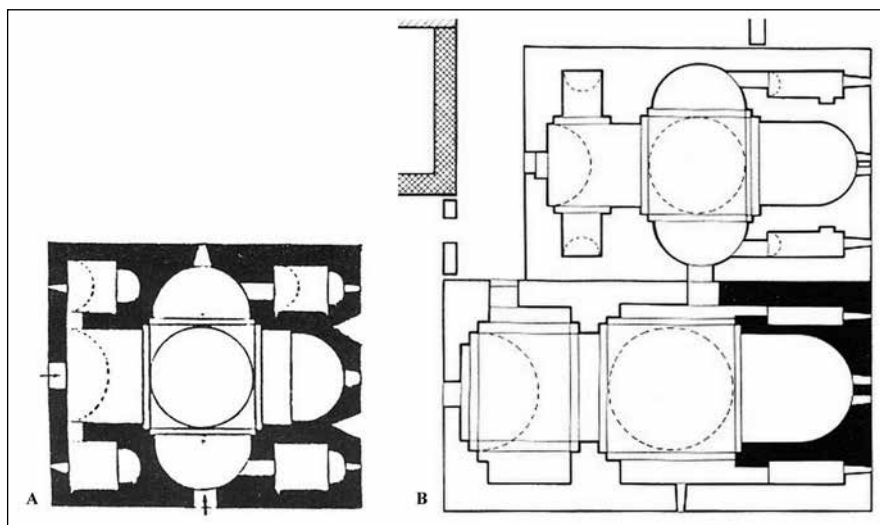


Fig. 16. A – Kot'avank' Monastery, ground plan of the church; B – Varagavank' Monastery, ground plan of the churches of St. John (north) and St. Sophia (south) (both plans after J.-M. Thierry et al.)

Сл. 16. А – Манастир Котавањк, основа цркве; В – Манастир Варагаванк, основа црква св. Јована и св. Софије (обе основе према Ж. М. Тијерију и др.)

spatial and liturgical organization of the church's western part also appears in Serbian churches of the following centuries.¹⁸ The forms of remaining wall masses, however, offer some other solutions, as well. Namely, the mass of masonry in the northern part could have provided a structural frame for a spiral staircase leading to the second floor (see *fig. 9B*). On the other hand, the relatively thin wall of the narthex speaks against the existence of an upper storey. Therefore, if it existed at all, it must have been formed over a wooden floor deck (see *figs. 10, 11A*). Also, it could have been organized only above the narthex area (as a *κατηχουμένειον*). However, on its form and function – whether it had a *pareklēsis* or was a mere gallery – one can only hypothesize.¹⁹

examples, where the funerary character of the northwest chapel and the accommodation of the Blessing of the Waters in the southwest one are confirmed by wall painting programs, archaeological findings, and written sources. Chapels flanking the narthex and architecturally integrated into the body of the church are discussed in S. Ćurčić, *Architectural Significance of Subsidiary Chapels in Middle Byzantine Churches*, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* XXXVI/2 (Chicago 1977), 94-110, 99-105. For the water blessing rites and their spatial settings, see N. Stanković, *At the Threshold of the Heavens: The Narthex and Adjacent Spaces in Middle Byzantine Churches of Mount Athos (10th-11th Centuries) – Architecture, Function, and Meaning* (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2017), 220-222, 312-313, 437-439 (with older bibliography).

¹⁸ See O. Kandić, *Fonts for the Blessing of the Waters in Serbian Medieval Churches*, *Зограф* 27 (Београд 1998-1999): 61-77; Д. Поповић, *Српски владарски гроб у средњем веку*, Београд, Приштина 1992.

¹⁹ Architectural and functional aspects of the *katēchoumeneion* in Middle Byzantine

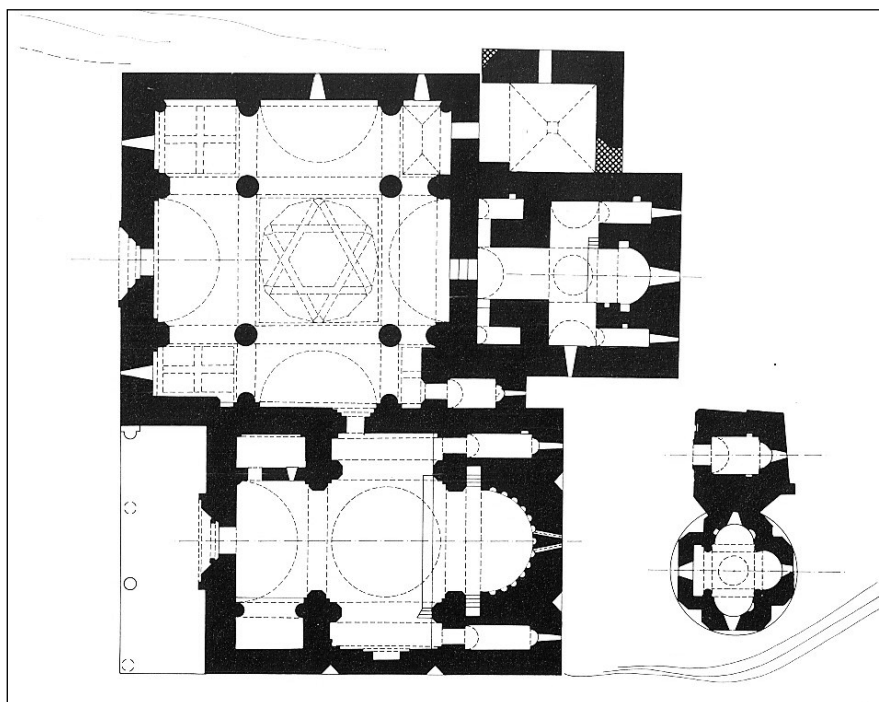


Fig. 17. Makaravank' Monastery, ground plan of the church compound (after P. Cuneo)

Сл. 17. Манастир Макараванк, основа црквеног комплекса (према П. Кунеу)

Comparative Examples and the Date of Construction

For all these reasons, one has to turn to typologically similar monuments. Analogies can shed more light on the presumable architectural form of the Ribare church and on the organization of its interior. Also, they provide the likely timeframe and historical context of the construction. Criteria for the selection of comparative examples are the reconstructed ground plan of the church and the spatial and functional elements in the organization of its interior.

The presence of a triconchal layout in a church found on the Serbian soil directs the search for analogies first to the church architecture of the late 14th and early 15th centuries, i. e. the so-called Morava School. Several examples from this period do show certain similarities in plan and treatment of the interior space, but not in the exterior. The first of these is the church of Drenča (built in the 1350s; *fig. 12A*),²⁰ whose plan exhibits a few features that are comparable to those at Ribare: horseshoe-shaped *bēma*, the two *parabēmata* laid at

monastic churches, those of Mount Athos in particular, are thoroughly analyzed in Stanković, *At the Threshold of the Heavens ...*, 338-385.

²⁰ On the architecture of Drenča, see Б. Вуловић, *Проблем рестаурације манастира Дренче*, Зборник за ликовне уметности Матице српске 14 (Нови Сад 1978): 213-233.

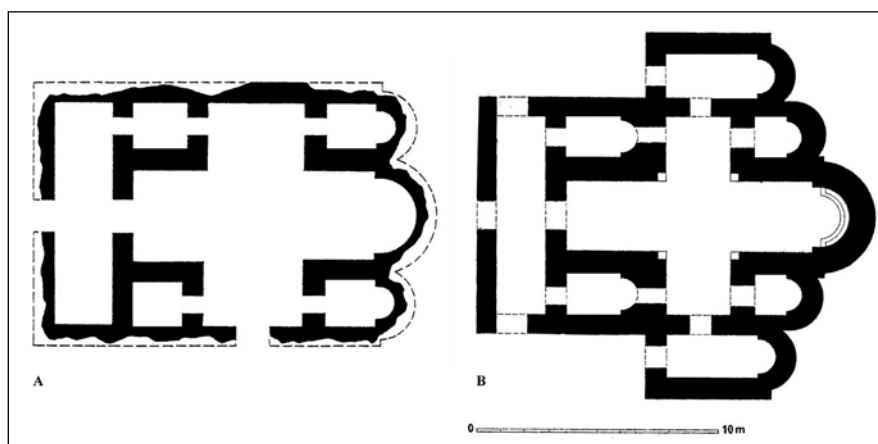


Fig. 18. A – Ground plan of the church on Büyükkada; B – Ground plan of the church in Chersonese (both after S. Ćurčić)

Сл. 18. А – Основа цркве на Бујукади; В – Основа цркве у Херсону (обе према С. Ћурчићу)

oblique angles and communicating with the lateral conches' areas.²¹ However, all these are most probably just irregularities in construction of the church that basically has a cross-in-square plan with two shallow conches added on the lateral sides. Similarly, the churches in Lešje (1355-60; *fig. 12B*),²² Petruša (1350s or 1360s; *fig. 12C*),²³ Lapušnja (1501; *fig. 12D*),²⁴ and Lozica (undated; *fig. 12E*)²⁵ somewhat resonate with the church at Ribare, to which they are geographically even closer than the church of Drenča. They all share similar

²¹ It is worth noting that the *katholikon* of Đurđevi Stupovi at Ras (completed in 1170/71) also has the *prothesis* and *diakonikon*, or at least their vaults, placed at an angle with the *bēta* (see J. Нешковић, *Ђурђеви Ступови у старом Расу: Постанак архитектуре цркве св. Ђорђа и стварање рашког типа споменика у архитектури средњовековне Србије*, Краљево 1984, 58-65). However, this is a complex, tripartite sanctuary, which had become the standard solution by this date, not a set of three separate rooms. Similar orientations of the *pastophoria* in both churches were perhaps necessitated by the spatial and structural solutions applied in the *naos*: the position of two piers between the naos and the sanctuary at Đurđevi Stupovi and the presence of side conches at Ribare.

²² On the remains of a church in the village of Lešje, see Ђ. Бошковић, *Средњовековни споменици североисточне Србије*, Старица I (Београд 1950): 185-218, 212, *fig. 75*, Б. Кнежевић, *Средњовековне цркве и манастири у долини Црнице*, Зборник за ликовне уметности Матице српске 16 (Нови Сад 1980): 223-259, and В. Ристић, *Моравска архитектура*, Крушевац 1996, 219-220.

²³ Кнежевић, *op. cit.*, 243-245; Ристић, *op. cit.*, 225.

²⁴ Б. Кнежевић, *Манастир Лапушња*, Саопштења Републичког завода за заштиту споменика културе XVIII (Београд 1986): 83-114; also S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans: From Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent*, New Haven – London 2010, 788-789.

²⁵ Бошковић, *Средњовековни споменици североисточне Србије*, 207, *fig. 69*.

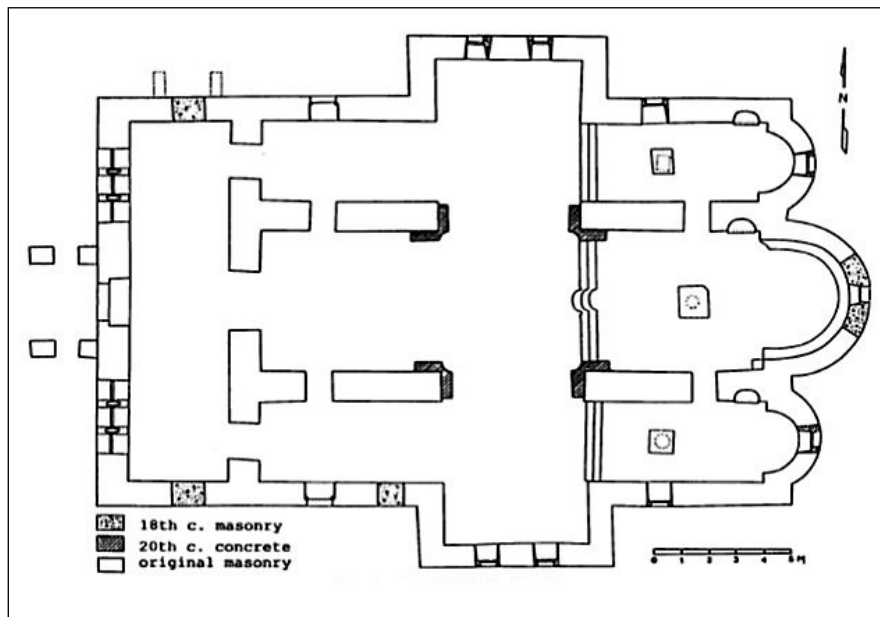


Fig. 19. Panagia tou Skripou, ground plan (after A. Papalexandrou)

Сл. 19. Богородичина црква у Скрипуу, основа (према Е. Папалександру)

dimensions and the way the east corner rooms align with the lateral conches and open to them.²⁶ However, the rooms in the four churches appear as if merely attached to the main core, not organically integrated in the overall design, as is the case at Ribare. Moreover, they all, including the church of Drenča, feature lateral conches projecting outwards and visible in the exterior, not inscribed in the masses of the walls and concealed by them. Also, the eastern ends of these churches have a tripartite arrangement, with the three rooms spatially and functionally connected, which suggests that they were parts of a single complex sanctuary space. Evidently, none of the features in these churches is fully comparable neither in form, nor in function to the formally similar elements found in the Ribare church.²⁷ Therefore, the late medieval dating should be dismissed and one has to look at another period for potential architectural analogies and for a possible date of construction.

²⁶ An additional point of similarity between Petruša and Lapušnja, on one side, and the Ribare church, on the other, is that their sanctuary apses are semicircular to the exterior.

²⁷ The same can be said about the church of St. John the Forerunner (dated to 1263) on the island of Sveti Ivan near Sozopol, Bulgaria, which also features some similarities, but only on the formal level: lateral conches contained within the encompassing rectangle of the church plan, but only partially concealed by wall masses; eastern corner rooms accessed from the nave (although not through conches), but also from the *bēma*; north and south bays of the narthex terminate in diminutive sanctuary spaces, accommodated within the masonry masses (<http://svetimesta.com/Манастири/Созополски манастир - Св. Йоан Кръстител> [accessed on December 27, 2018], with data, bibliography, ground plan, and photographs of

Churches with triconchal layouts continue to be built in the following centuries, under the Ottoman rule, and they exhibit various architectural articulations of this design concept. Can, then, they be the architectural and chronological relatives of the church at Ribare? I think they cannot for two major reasons. First, the three separate rooms at the eastern end of the Ribare church do not conform to the developed, tripartite sanctuary space that continues to be used in the post-medieval period. And second, no triconch church dated to this period has been recorded with the lateral conches being concealed within wall masses that have flat faces to the exterior.²⁸ Moreover, the relatively large size of the Ribare church makes its construction in the mountainous area with small and poor villages, and on the site that lacks remains of an older Christian church highly improbable during the Ottoman rule. Judging from the late 15th-century records and the lack of mention of an ecclesiastic building or clergy in Đurinac,²⁹ it seems that the church was already in the ruinous condition, probably for a long time, and that its building date should be looked for in a period that preceded both of the above-discussed timeframes.

Typologically closer analogies, which almost fully correspond to our church in both plan and organization of space, one finds in the present-day Bulgaria and North Macedonia. These are two churches, of virtually the same plan: a church in the locality of Kale in the village of Krupište (near Štip), known as the “Red Church” (*fig. 13A*),³⁰ and a church in the village of Kulata (near Petrich; *fig. 13B*)³¹. Some scholars have regarded the former as a 5th-6th-century structure,³² while the others are of an opinion that it belongs to the

the remains). I thank Ivan Vasilev for bringing this church to my attention and providing the reference information.

²⁸ Consult M. Шупут, *Српска архитектура у доба турске власти, 1459-1690*, Београд 1984, for an overview of the Serbian church architecture from the 15th to the end of the 17th centuries, and eadem, *Споменици српског црквеног градителства XVI - XVII век*, Београд, Нови Сад, Приштина 1991, for a catalog of churches built in the 16th and 17th centuries. The only examples that spatially resemble the *naos* and eastern end of the Ribare church and similarly have north and south walls flat to the exterior are the monastic churches of Rača and the Holy Trinity in Ovčar (see Шупут, *Српска архитектура у доба турске власти*, *fig. 25* [4, 5], and Шупут, *Споменици српског црквеног градителства*, 173-176).

²⁹ See above, notes 3 and 4.

³⁰ Б. Алексова, *Крупиште, Штипско – археолошки истражувања 1975 и 1981 година*, Зборник на Археолошкиот музеј X-XII (Скопје 1983): 85-100, 93-95; eadem, *Епископијата на Брегалница: Прв словенски црковен и културно-просветен центар во Македонија*, Прилеп 1989, 110-111, *figs. 98, 99*; 3. Белдедовски, *Брегалничкиот басен во римскиот и раниот средновековен период*, Зборник VI – Посебно издание, Штип 1990, 37.

³¹ Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Триконхалните църкви от IX-XIV в. по българските земи*, Археология XII/4 (София 1970): 8-21, 14, and eadem, *Църковната архитектура на Първата българска държава*, София 1984, 153-154 (citing А. Милчев, *Триконхална църква в околностите на с. Кулата, Благоевградско: Археологически разкопки и проучавания в долината на Средна Струма*, Годишник на Софийския университет, Филологическо-исторически факултет I (София 1984), 401-449, which was unavailable to me).

³² Алексова, *Крупиште ...*, 95, and Алексова, *Епископијата на Брегалница*, 81-85, 111 (adding here that the church was “renovated” in the 9th-10th century).

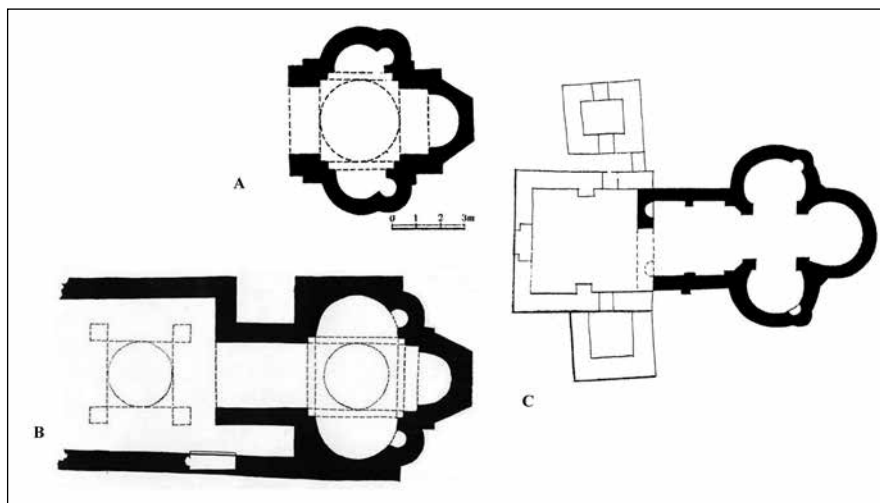


Fig. 20. A – Church of St. Panteleēmōn at Plaošnik (Ohrid), ground plan of the oldest part;
B – Monastery of St. Hahum (Ohrid Lake), ground plan of the original church of Holy
Archangels; C – Church of St. John in Zaton on Lim, ground plan

Сл. 20. А – Црква св. Пантелејмона на Плаошнику (Охрид), основа најстаријег дела;
В – Манастир св. Наума (Охридско језеро), основа првобитне цркве св. Архангела;
С – Црква св. Јована у Затону на Лиму, основа

Middle Byzantine period.³³ I would opt for the latter as more probable, as the church's spatial organization is more in line with certain design solutions that emerged in the period.³⁴ The church in Kulata has been dated to the time between 10th and 12th centuries.³⁵ Although these two churches differ from that in Ribare in a few details,³⁶ the shared unusual plan of the inscribed triconch is very striking. Unfortunately, both churches are preserved only in the lower zones, therefore not much helpful in a trial to visualize the upper parts of our church. However, it seems almost certain that both churches had domes over their central bays and cross-in-square shaped roofs,³⁷ thus supporting the possibility that the same was the case in Ribare, as well. Similarities do not end

³³ Either between 7th and 9th centuries (N. Kurtović-Folić, *Trikonhos – poreklo i mesto u razvoju arhitektonskih oblika* (doktorska teza, Arhitektonski fakultet u Beogradu, 1991), IV-199) or 9th-10th century (Čurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 336).

³⁴ Characteristics and some examples of this spatial organization are discussed below.

³⁵ Чанева-Дечевска, *Триконхалните църкви ...*, 14.

³⁶ For example, the *parabēmata* of the former two communicate directly with the central space of the sanctuary, thus suggesting that they may have indeed served as the *pastophoria*. Also, the *parabēmata* do not feature apses projecting outwards and the main apse is three-sided externally rather than semicircular. All these aspects point to a greater sophistication in design in these two churches, suggesting the involvement of better skilled building workshops.

³⁷ For the church in Krupište, Blaga Aleksova assumes that it had also domes over the corner rooms (Алексова, *Крупниште ...*, 94) – perhaps, on the ground of their square plans – but, for many reasons, this seems highly improbable.

here. In regard to the function, the room adjoining the narthex to the north in the church of Kulata has been identified as a *parekklētion* and the southern one encloses a quatrefoil font (see *fig. 13B*).³⁸ This supports the above-mentioned thesis that the southwest room in our church could have been used for the installation of a water receptacle and, thus, provided the venue for the Blessing of the Waters on Epiphany.

The churches in Kulata and Krupište have been compared to Armenian churches of this type (Varagavank' near Lake Van, for example)³⁹ and particularly with a couple of churches in southern Greece, such as St. Nicholas in Aulis (Boeotia, middle of the 11th century; *fig. 14A*)⁴⁰ and St. Dēmētrios in Varassova (second half of the 10th or beginning of the 11th century; *fig. 14B*).⁴¹ St. Nicholas has been demolished, but photographs from the 1890s of the still-standing church show that it was crowned by a dome.⁴² St. Dēmētrios has survived only partially, but similarly has been reconstructed as a domed structure.⁴³ The rooms between the arms of the cross have been ascribed with the function of *parekklēsia*, without determining the precise aspect of their paraclesiastic use.⁴⁴ Two churches from the Ohrid Lake area roughly dated to the 9th-10th century can be added to these: the church at Gorica, featuring a triconch, likely inscribed, with rooms extending from the narthex to the east, like in St. Dēmētrios, and the church at Vineni (*fig. 14C*), which – unlike St. Dēmētrios – has two eastern corner chambers – the north one featuring an entrance from the north conch, in addition to the connection with the *bēma* – and they are inscribed in the volume of the building, together with the lateral conches, but lacks western corner rooms.⁴⁵ Another church can be called to attention, the

³⁸ Чанева-Дечевска, *Църковната архитектура* ..., 153. The presence of the font has led Neli Chaneva-Dechevska to mark the southern chamber as the baptistery, but the font was most likely reserved for the water blessing rites instead (*cf.* above, notes 13 and 14).

³⁹ *Cf.* Чанева-Дечевска, *Църковната архитектура* ..., 154, and Kurtović-Folić, *op. cit.*, IV-171, n. 564. Armenian analogies are discussed at a greater detail below.

⁴⁰ This church was demolished at the beginning of the 20th century. The architectural documentation, an analysis, and a proposed reconstruction are provided in X. Μπούρας, *Συμπληρωματικά στοιχεία για ένα κατεστραμμένο ναό της Βοιωτίας*, Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας 4 (Αθήναι 1964-1965): 227-244.

⁴¹ Α. Κ. Ορλανδος, *Ο Αγ. Δημήτριος της Βαρασόβας*, Αρχαίον των βυζαντινών μνημείων της Ελλάδος 1 (Αθήναι 1935), 105-120.

⁴² Μπούρας, *op. cit.*, plates 43.2 and 44.

⁴³ Ορλανδος, *op. cit.*, fig. 3.

⁴⁴ See Ćurčić, *Architectural Significance of Subsidiary Chapels* ..., 99-100, 101-102 (where St. Nicholas is considered a mature version of the church type with four compactly arranged chapels). As in the churches of Kulata and Krupište, the apses of the *parabēmata* are set within the thickness of walls.

⁴⁵ The plans of these two churches are included in Ђ. Јанковић, *Српско Поморје од 7. до 10. столећа*, Београд 2007, fig. 161 (4, 6), with references.

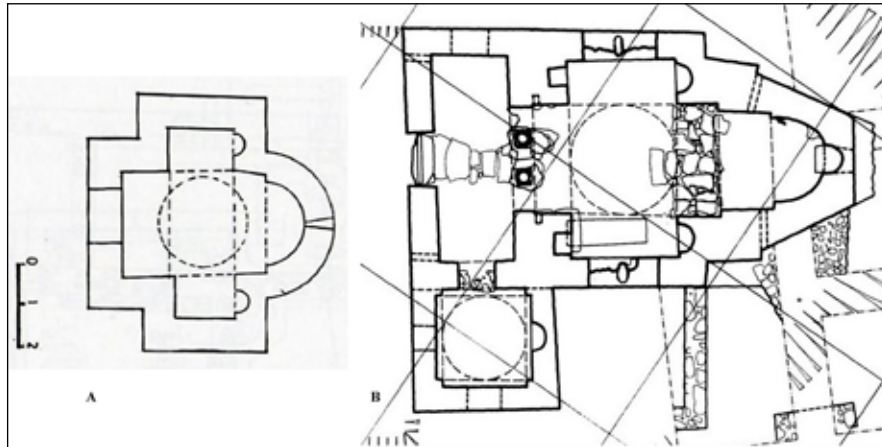


Fig. 21. A – Ground plan of the church in Teranci (after B. Aleksova); B – Bargala (Goren Kozjak), church of St. George, ground plan (after B. Aleksova and C. Mango)

Сл. 21. А – Основа цркве у Теранцима (према Б. Алексовој); В – Баргала (Горен Козјак), црква св. Ђорђа, основа (према Б. Алексовој и С. Мангу)

so-called Triconch of Tağar, in Cappadocia (*fig. 15*).⁴⁶ This rock-cut structure features two rectangular rooms east of the lateral conches and entered solely through them. The northern one has a shallow apse to the east.⁴⁷

The comparison with Armenian churches deserves some scrutiny, because even greater similarities in plan and form exist between the church in Ribare and a number of Armenian churches. Therefore, despite the lack of evidence that would relate these geographically very distant monuments, the analogies should not be overlooked. A few examples are brought up here to illustrate the application of two most striking features found in our church: a triconch (or, sometimes, tetraconch) inscribed in a rectangle and rooms flanking the sanctuary accessed only from the *naos*, through the lateral conches. These are the churches of the Holy Mother of God at Sewan (874), Kot'avank' (*ca.* 890), St. Gregory of Vanevan Monastery (903), Gndevank' (936), West C'ağac'k'ar (*ca.* 935), St. John at Varagavank' (late 10th cent.?), and Holy Apostles in Ani (first third of the 11th cent.).⁴⁸ Of these, the closest in plan are Kot'avank' and St. John at Varagavank' (*figs. 16A, 16B*). The only differences are that the plans of both churches are completely inscribed in rectangles, including the eastern apses, and the two rooms flanking the sanctuary are parallel to it, not set at an angle, although they are accessed solely through the lateral conches of the *naos*.

⁴⁶ S. Kostof, *Caves of God: Cappadocia and Its Churches*, New York 1989, 114-119.

⁴⁷ This chamber has been identified as the *prothesis* (*ibid.*, 119), probably based on its position north of the sanctuary. However, the lack of communication with the sanctuary and the considerable size of the chamber suggest that it may have been a liturgically independent room, a chapel.

⁴⁸ For the ground plans and brief information on these churches, see J.-M. Thierry *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 573 (*fig. 831, B*), 598 (*fig. B.a*), 586-587 (*fig. 866, A*), 599 (*fig. B.b*), *loc. cit.*, 587-588 (*fig. 870, B*), 485 (*fig. 600*), respectively.

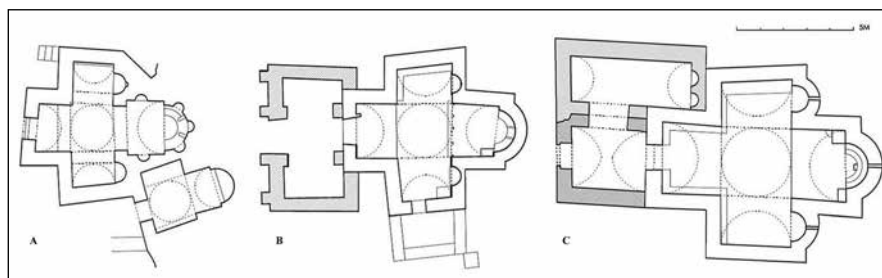


Fig. 22. Ground plans of some cruciform churches on Naxos (after K. Aslanidis): A – Holy Cross at Kakavas, B – Panagia Damniōtissa, and C – St. John the Theologian at Avlōnitsa

Сл. 22. Основе крсообразних цркава на Наксосу (према К. Асланидису): А – Св. Крст у Какавасу, В – Панагија Дамниотиса и С – Св. Јован Богослов у Авлоници

Many other Armenian churches – mostly built in the late 12th or first half of the 13th century, with a few exceptions dating from the 10th and 11th century – even when not employing side conches, but rectangular extensions forming a cross with the central bays to the east and west, exhibit a similar spatial arrangement, with the eastern corner rooms entered from the north and south arms of the inscribed cross.⁴⁹ As illustrative examples, I bring the two main monastic churches of Makaravank⁵⁰, the north of them dated to the 10th-11th centuries (?) and the south one built in 1205 (*fig. 17*).⁵⁰ Most of these churches also feature two chambers or open alcoves on the north and south sides of the western bay (narthex area).

The transmission of this spatial and design solution from distant Armenia to our church in the central Balkans could be explained by the potential presence of a small Armenian community, monastic or lay, and/or the sponsorship of an Armenian notable. The latter was the case with the now lost church of Sts. James and Peter, donated by Ladon, son of Babug, in 1218, according to the founding inscription written in both Church Slavonic and Armenian on a stone slab, which is now housed in Vitovnica Monastery (near Petrovac na Mlavi, central eastern Serbia).⁵¹ Unfortunately, this church, which was most likely located not far from Vitovnica,⁵² has not been preserved and its form is not known, thus not allowing one to establish whether and how the sponsorship was manifested in its design. Nonetheless, this case shows that Armenian connections, although extremely rare, were not completely foreign to the central Balkans.

⁴⁹ For these, see *ibid.*, 478 (fig. 580, B), 487-488 (fig. 609), 490 (fig. 613, A), 526 (fig. 714), 530-531 (fig. 723), 532 (fig. 726), 536 (fig. 738, B), 553-554 (fig. 775, A), 559 (fig. 793, A), 560 (fig. 795), 567 (fig. 813, A), 568 (church of the Mother of God), 579 (fig. 846), 586 (fig. 863), 587-588 (fig. 870, A), 589 (fig. 875), 600 (fig. B.d).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 552-553 (fig. 772).

⁵¹ Б. Кнежевић, *Плоча са двојезичним натписом из 1218. године у Витовници*, Саопштења Републичког завода за заштиту споменика културе XXIX (Београд 1997): 47-50 (with older bibliography on the inscription).

⁵² In the village of Ranovac, at the locality of Jakovljević manastir (*ibid.*, 47-48).

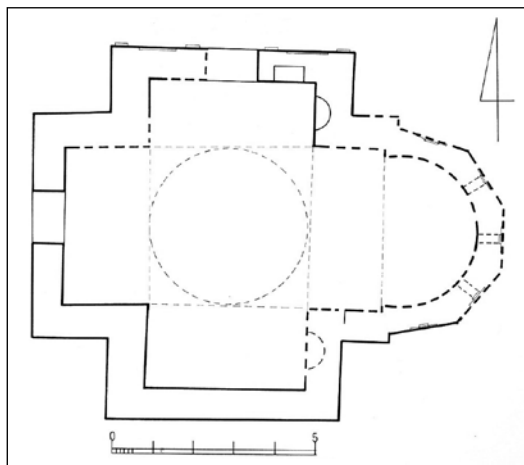


Fig. 23. Church at Yağdebaşı, Cappadocia, ground plan (after M. Restle)

Сл. 23. Црква у Јадебашу, Кападокија, основа (према М. Рестлеу)

Returning to regions geographically closer than Armenia and other architectural analogies, it is worth bringing into discussion churches that, strictly speaking, do not belong to the type examined here, but which share with it the same concept of space and internal organization, characteristic for the Middle Byzantine period. This is the presence of multiple chambers, often serving as chapels, accommodated between the arms of a cross-shaped nave inscribed in a rectangular body of the church. Characteristic examples are a church at Büyüykada (early 8th century?; *fig. 18A*) and a church in Chersonese (first half of the 10th century?; *fig. 18B*),⁵³ which have the two chambers flanking the sanctuary entered only from the *naos*, as the Ribare church does. Similarly, the two apsed rooms in the east corners at Panagia tou Skripou (Boeotia, 873/74; *fig. 19*) are in fact *parekklēsia*, although they maintain connections with the church's sanctuary.⁵⁴ It is generally accepted that this design concept, which has subsidiary chapels integrated in the body of the church building, even though present in earlier periods, was ultimately defined with the design of the Nea Ekklēsia ("New Church") in Constantinople, built by Basil I the Macedonian and dedicated in 880/81.⁵⁵ The *prestige* of this magnificent edifice caused its emulation in different variants, larger or smaller, within a short period of time and widely across the Empire. The application of similar organization in our church may explain its compact design and presence of independent liturgical spaces despite its relatively small scale.

However, the inclusion of eastern corner chambers, especially those accessed solely from the nave, was not driven by design concerns alone. Several

⁵³ For these two churches, see Ćurčić, *Architectural Significance of Subsidiary Chapels* ..., 104-105.

⁵⁴ A. Papalexandrou, *The Church of the Virgin of Skripou: Architecture, Sculpture and Inscriptions in Ninth-Century Byzantium* (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1998), esp. 258-298.

⁵⁵ For the Nea Ekklēsia, see N. Stanković, *Nea Ekklesia*, online Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Volume 3: Constantinople (with bibliography) – <http://constantinople.ehw.gr/forms/fLemmaBodyExtended.aspx?lemmaID=12328> (accessed on January 18, 2019).

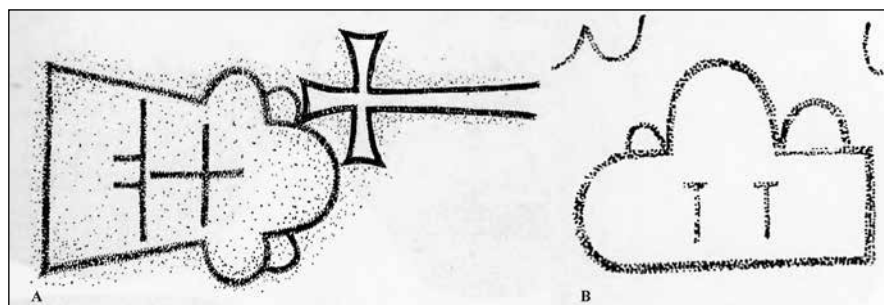


Fig. 24. Drawings incised in a stone slab found at the locality of Kale in Krupište (after B. Aleksova): A – ground plan of a triconchal church; B – ground plan of a transept with attached apses

Сл. 24. Цртежи урезани на каменој плочи нађеној на локалитету Кале у Крупишту (према Б. Алексовој): А – основа триконхалне цркве; В – основа црквеног трансета са придруженим апсидама

contemporaneous churches situated in the central Balkans feature triconchal plans and notably pronounced niches on the east sides of their lateral conches. These are the churches of St. Panteleēmōn in Ohrid (built before 893 by St. Clement of Ohrid; *fig. 20A*),⁵⁶ Holy Archangels in the Monastery of St. Nahum (Ohrid Lake, *ca.* 900),⁵⁷ whose foundations also show that the lateral apses were concealed by the externally flat wall masses (*fig. 20B*), and St. John in Zaton on the Lim river (Montenegro, end of the 10th or beginning of the 11th cent.; *fig. 20C*).⁵⁸ Niches are also found in a number of churches of the cruciform plans,⁵⁹ most of them similarly dated to the 10th-11th century, in the east walls of their north and south cross arms: Teranci (near Kočani, *fig. 21A*), Boboševo,⁶⁰ and St. George at Bargala (Goren Kozjak, *fig. 21B*)⁶¹ in North Macedonia; St. Peter in Manē (Lakonia, Peloponnese) and St. Basil *para tēn Gephyran* (Arta) in continental Greece;⁶² St. Kyriakē at Stavropēgē, Stavros

⁵⁶ Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 323-324.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁵⁸ Ј. Нешковић, *Црква Св. Јована у Затону на Лиму*, Саопштења Републичког завода за заштиту споменика културе XXXV-XXXVI (Београд 2003-2004): 61-77; for the possible date of construction, see *ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁹ I agree with Slobodan Ćurčić, who sees the “compact triconch”, employed in the previous three churches, and the “free cross” as functionally interchangeable types (Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 325).

⁶⁰ The ground plans of these two churches are in Алексова, *Епископијата на Брегалница*, 316, figs. 16, 18; for various dates ascribed to the former, see *ibid.*, 150, n. 38.

⁶¹ The construction date of this church is uncertain; the second of three layers of its interior wall plastering is dateable to the 13th century (B. Aleksova, C. Mango, *Bargala: A Preliminary Report*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 25 (Washington, DC, 1971): 265-281, 273-277), which indicates the *terminus ante quem*. Based on certain archaeological evidence, Алексова, *Епископијата на Брегалница*, 147 (n. 14), determines that the church was built at the end of the 9th or the beginning of the 10th century.

⁶² For these two churches, see Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 325-327 (figs. 350A, 350C, 351).

(Holy Cross) at Kakavas (*fig. 22A*), Panagia Damniōtissa (*fig. 22B*), and St. John the Theologian at Avlōnitsa on the island of Naxos (*fig. 22C*);⁶³ and Süt Kilise and Yağdebaşı in Cappadocia (*fig. 23*).⁶⁴ It is not entirely clear what the function of these niches was. However, one can argue that these features are not just a chance occurrence, as they appear with some frequency and consistence, and that they must have been provisions for certain, now unknown liturgical or devotional functions. In some cases, the sheer size of the niches and the spaces in front of them allows the possibility that the *naos*'s north and south extensions served as subsidiary chapels, with the niches offering diminutive sanctuaries.⁶⁵ In another cases, the niches were likely used for the display of holy relics or precious icons.⁶⁶ By comparing the niches' position on the eastern sides of the lateral conches to the two apsed chambers flanking the sanctuary similarly accessed only from the conches, the situation we have in our church, or from the cross arms, as in the churches at Büyükkada and Chersonese, one concludes that the two chambers likely had the same or similar purpose, i.e. were used as either subsidiary liturgical spaces (*parekklēsia*) or depositories of sacred items. If this indeed was the case, the niches could have represented a reduced version of the chambers.

Drawings incised on a stone slab, which was found in the western part of the already discussed church in Krupište,⁶⁷ additionally testify to the apparent importance of these niches. One of the drawings depicts a schematic ground plan of a triconchal church, with semicircular chambers or niches attached to

⁶³ See K. Ασλανίδης, *Βυζαντινή ναοδομία στη Νάξο: Η μετεξέλιξη από την παλαιο-χριστιανική στη μεσοβυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική* (διδακτορική διατριβή, Πανεπιστήμιο Πατρών, 2014), 102-118, drawings 28-32, and plates 34-41 (especially *figs. 37β, 37γ, 39γ, 41β*, for the photographs of the niches). The first two of these four churches were built and painted during the period of Iconoclasm, whereas the other two are dated to the late 10th – early 11th century (*ibid.*, 103, 107, 112, 117).

⁶⁴ For these two, see Restle, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 84-85 (both churches categorized as Middle or Late Byzantine), Vol. 2, plans 50, 51, *figs. 166, 176* (photographs of the niches); see also W. M. Ramsay, Gertrude L. Bell, *The Thousand and One Churches*, London 1909, 364-375, *figs. 290-297*. An 11th-century rock-cut church located also in Cappadocia (Göreme, Chapel 27) can be added to these. Here, extending from the east sides of its cross arms, there are even deeper and larger conches that feature diminutive templon screens and altars attached to the east of their horseshoe-shaped spaces, indicating that they were separate sanctuaries (see Kostof, *op. cit.*, 109, *fig. 15*, and Teteriatnikov, *op. cit.*, 51).

⁶⁵ Cf. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 324, who concludes that the function of niches in triconch churches is “impossible to determine with precision, but they probably had some sort of liturgical purpose.” On the other hand, the eastern niches in the north and south arms of the “free cross” churches are seen as a clear indication of the arms' employment as subsidiary chapels (*ibid.*, 327, and Ασλανίδης, *op. cit.*, 282-283). See also previous note.

⁶⁶ According to K. Aslanidis, *The Evolution from Early Christian to Middle Byzantine Church Architecture on the Island of Naxos*, Naxos and the Byzantine Aegean: Insular Responses to Regional Change, eds. J. Crow and D. Hill, Athens 2018: 311-337, 320, the niches in two unspecified examples appear to have accommodated relics of saints.

⁶⁷ Алексова, *Крупиште ...*, 96, *fig. 21*, and Алексова, *Епископијата на Брегалница*, 84-85, *fig. 100* (here partially reproduced in *fig. 24*). I express my gratitude to Igor Kuzmanoski, archaeologist at the City Museum of Skopje, who brought this finding to my attention in summer 2003.

the lateral conches on their east sides (*fig. 24A*).⁶⁸ Moreover, in the narthex zone one can discern something resembling a division into smaller rooms. Is this the plan of the Krupište church? Whether it is or not, this drawing definitely confirms that all these architectural provisions were of great interest to the draftsman (was this the architect himself?), who did not omit to depict them all in just a rough sketch of a church. And similar is the case in another drawing on the same slab (*fig. 24B*). It appears to be the plan of a church transept with a semicircular sanctuary and two additional smaller apses, which adjoin the transept's arms on the east side. Although the importance of the concave niches in both cases is evident, the exact purpose and function of the niches or, as in our case, entire chambers attached to the lateral conches are still to be established.

At the end of the analysis of analogies and based on their dates, I would propose the time between the 9th and the 12th century as the broad chronological frame of the Ribare church's construction, with the 10th or 11th century as the most probable date. If the foundation indeed took place in the 11th century, the church – and, possibly, a monastic complex surrounding it – could likely have been erected as a product of the renewed Byzantine political, cultural, and religious presence in the central Balkans brought by the military *reconquista* of 1018. Even though we do not possess much of information on history of the region of Svrljig during the long period between the 6th and 12th centuries at this moment, it seems that it was relatively vibrant, since it was mentioned in a chrysobull issued by Basil II in 1019.⁶⁹ It probably remained so at least up to 1183, when the fortified town of Svrljig, together with a number of others on the east border between Serbia and Byzantium, was attacked and devastated (or destroyed) in a war campaign lead by Grand *Župan* Stefan Nemanja.⁷⁰ The 11th century may have indeed brought the religious renewal to the area. And monastic communities, particularly those of coenobitic organization – championed by the Stoudite movement, which was on its peak at the time – may have been instrumental in this process.⁷¹

⁶⁸ This drawing is also analyzed by Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 325, in the context of a discussion of triconchal churches featuring deep niches attached to their lateral conches and of the transmission of architectural ideas.

⁶⁹ This document lists dioceses in the newly-regained territories and grants them certain rights. The bishopric of Νίσος (Niš) had Σφελίγοβο (Svrljig) included as one of four urban centers or administrative units, apart from Nisos, within its boundaries (С. Новаковић, *Охридска архиепископија у почетку XI века: Хрисовуље цара Василија II од 1019. и 1020. год.*, Глас Српске краљевске академије LXXVI, Други разред 46 (Београд 1908): 1-62, 33).

⁷⁰ Стефан Првовенчани, *Житије Светог Симеона*, VII, Сабрана дела, изд. Љ. Јухас-Георгиевска – Т. Јовановић, Београд 1999, 38 (original text), 39 (modern Serbian translation). For the date of the campaign, see Б. Ферјанчић, *Стефан Немања у византијској политици друге половине XII века*, Стефан Немања – Свети Симеон Мироточиви: Историја и предање, ур. Јованка Калић, (Београд 2000): 31-45, 37, and М. Благојевић, *О „Земљишту радње Немањине“*, *ibid.*: 65-75, 73-74.

⁷¹ Introductory information on the Stoudite reform movement (with bibliography) can be found in A. Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071*, Crestwood, NY, 2007, 108-117, 227-240; T. Pott, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform: A Study of Liturgical Change in the Byzantine Tradition* (trans. P. Meyendorff), Crestwood, NY, 2010, 115-151; and D. Krausmüller, O. Grinchenko, *The Tenth-Century Stoudios-Typikon and its Impact on*

If some future archaeological excavations confirm that the church was indeed built in this period, its remains will certainly constitute one of rare examples of architecture of this period not only in east Serbia, but also in broader space of the central Balkans. The remains would be even more important if the excavations could establish that they were part of a monastic complex. Potential material evidence would shed some light on historical and life conditions of the inhabitants of an area of the Balkans that was not located near large cities and along a major communication route. For these reasons, a systematic archaeological excavation and subsequent research comes as the next step in the study of this monument.

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ЈЕДНА НЕОБИЧНА ТРИКОНХАЛНА ЦРКВА У ОКОЛИНИ СВРЉИГА
(МАНАСТИРИШТЕ СВЕТЕ ПЕТКЕ РУСАЛНЕ): ПРВОБИТНА ФОРМА,
АРХИТЕКТОНСКЕ АНАЛОГИЈЕ И МОГУЋЕ ДАТОВАЊЕ

Локалитет Манастириште Свете Петке Русалне налази се између селā Рибаре и Ђуринац, југоисточно од данашње варошице Сврљиг. На локалитету су видљиви остаци цркве, који показују да је црква била немалих габарита, те интересантне и нетипичне основе. Ради се о триконхалном унутрашњем простору уписаном у масу зидова који су споља праволинијски, за сада јединственом решењу у црквеној архитектури на подручју Србије. У источном делу храма су три просторије, свака са сопственом апсидом, која је и споља и изнутра полукружна. Просторије нису међусобно повезане, већ се свака отвара само према наосу. Уз то, две бочне просторије су постављене укосом у односу на осу централног, свакако олтарског простора, вероватно се тиме прилагођавајући кривинама бочних конхи, на које се ослањају. У западном делу цркве, који је вероватно служио као припрата, констатовани су бочни простори неједнаке величине и непознате намене, са источне стране полукружно завршени.

Анализа сачуваних облика, реконструисаних простора и пропорција, као и могућа намена појединих делова објекта показала је да се ради о цркви чији су морфолошки и географски најближи сродници нађени у данашњој Северној Македонији и Бугарској. Пре свих, то су две цркве, готово истоветних основа и обе сачуване само у остацима, црква у селу Крупиште (код Штипа) и црква у селу Кулата (код Петрича). Прва је датована у период од VII до IX века, док се друга ставља у време од X до XII века. Обе цркве се најчешће повезују са кападокијским и јерменским црквама овог типа и, нарочито, са две цркве у јужној Грчкој, Св. Николе у Аулиди (средином XI века) и Св. Димитрија у Варасови (X или XI век). Већи број цркава истоветног или сличног плана може се наћи у јерменској архитектури истог или нешто каснијег времена, те је могуће да је предметна црква изграђена за потребе непознате јерменске енклаве или као резултат ктиторства неког јерменског великаша, иако нема историјских података који би упућивали на везе са овим географски удаљеним подручјем. Поред ових, у упоредној анализи су узете у обзир и цркве које, строго узев, не припадају типу који се разматра, али са њим деле концепт и организацију унутрашњег простора, нарочито присуство параклиса интегрисаних у масу цркве, карактеристичне за средњовизантијски период.

На основу свега тога, као и из сагледавања историјских прилика у сврљишком крају, предложено је датовање рибарске цркве у X или XI век, са могућношћу да је објекат настао управо као део црквене и архитектонске обнове византијске власти на централном Балкану после поновног укључења ових географских простора у састав Византијског царства 1018. године.

